

WASHINGTON D.C. – Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, [today](#) called on the panel’s Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) to “hold a hearing on the coordination – or lack thereof – between the numerous departments and agencies responsible for food safety.”

“There is an alarming inconsistency in the approach of the Executive Branch with regard to protecting our food supply,” Issa wrote. “Currently, over fifteen departments and agencies have jurisdiction over our food safety. This top-line, multi-jurisdictional approach to food safety creates unnecessary bureaucratic overlap and confusion in ensuring the food that is delivered to our grocery stores, restaurants, farmers markets and homes is protected from outbreaks of foodborne illnesses, such as salmonella.”

Issa continued, “Our Committee is uniquely positioned to look at the coordination and cooperation amongst departments and agencies. [Last year \[February of 2009\]](#) , I wrote to you requesting a hearing on the federal food safety regulation, however that request went unanswered. We should not have wait until hundreds of deaths occur in a food crisis before we address the serious fragmentations in federal oversight of our increasingly global food supply chain.”

[In Issa’s February 2009 letter to Towns](#) , he wrote that, “The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has identified 15 federal agencies responsible for administering 30 food safety related laws. The lines of jurisdiction of the various agencies can be perplexing. For example, FDA has jurisdiction over establishments that sell or serve eggs or use them as ingredients and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulates the safety of liquid, frozen, dried, and damaged eggs.” Flash-forward to the present time where an outbreak of salmonella in shell eggs has required more than 500 million eggs in 22 states to be recalled. Currently, 2,000 illnesses have

been reported.

“The current egg recall demonstrates the confusion and lack of coordination among the federal departments and agencies responsible for food safety,” Issa wrote to Towns. “The FDA has responsibility for the safety of the whole egg, but the USDA regulates the chickens. Yet neither the FDA nor the USDA inspected either of the two Iowa-based facilities at the heart of this massive recall.”

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has issued numerous reports on the failures of our government to address deficiencies in protecting the public from foodborne illnesses. Five years ago, the GAO [issued a report entitled](#) , “Oversight of the Food Safety Activities: Federal Agencies Should Pursue Opportunities to Reduce Overlap and Better Leverage Resources,” where it found 71 interagency agreements that Executive Branch agencies had entered into to protect public health and coordinate food safety activities. However, the GAO found those agencies had “weak mechanisms” for tracking these agreements and, as such, had “ineffective implementation.” Five years later, the recommendations of the GAO have remained unanswered.

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